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## LOUCHEUX MYTHS.

COLLECTED BY CHARLES CAMSELL, AND PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION  
BY C. M. BARBEAU.

## INTRODUCTION.

THE following Loucheux myths and tales were collected in 1905 by Mr. Charles Camsell, geologist, of the Geological Survey of Canada. Mr. Camsell's informant was Peter Ross, a Loucheux of over forty-five years of age, living at Fort MacPherson (near the Mackenzie River delta). One night in 1905, while he was making a net in his camp, Ross spent many hours telling Loucheux tales in fluent English to Mr. Camsell, who the next day wrote them down from memory. In his childhood, Mr. Camsell had many times heard similar tales recited by an old Cree woman living at Fort Simpson, N. W. T.

## THE MYTHS.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD.<sup>1</sup>

In the days when the earth was all covered with water, the animals lived on a large raft. The Crow<sup>2</sup> said, "Had I any earth, even so little, I would make it grow large enough for all the animals to live upon." Muskrat, Otter, and many other divers went down under the waters and tried to bring up some earth; but they were all drowned. Last of all, Beaver dived with a line attached to his body. He went so deep that he was almost drowned when he reached the bottom. In his death-struggle he clutched some mud in his paws, and the mud was still there when he was drawn up lifeless by the line. Taking it and running his walking-stick through it, the Crow planted the stick in the water in such a way that the bit of earth rested at the surface of the water. The earth grew larger and larger. When it was big enough to hold all the animals, they stepped unto it from the raft.

The Crow's walking-stick is still supporting the land; and, as it has never rotted, it is still to be seen somewhere about the junction of the Old Crow and the Porcupine Rivers.

<sup>1</sup> For parallels see, among others, G. A. Dorsey and A. L. Kroeber, *Traditions of the Arapaho*, p. 20; also Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, p. 19; Petitot, *Monographie des D  n  -Dindji  *, pp. 74, 80; E. B. Wilson, *On the N. W. Tribes of Canada* (*Brit. Assoc. Adv. Sci.*, 1888, p. 244); J. de Sm  t, *Letters and Sketches . . . of the Rocky Mountains*, p. 40, footnote; J. Maclean, *Canadian Savage Folk*, pp. 51-52, 75-76; R. H. Lowie, *The Assiniboine*, p. 101; C. M. Barbeau, in *American Anthropologist*, N. S., vol. xvi, No. 2, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> The Crow is the Loucheux "great medicine-man" (that is, culture-hero), according to the informant.

## 2. THE DELUGE.

The Loucheux have some traditions about the great Flood. A god-likeman, it is belie ved, came out of the moon, to which he returned soon after the Flood.

## 3. THE BEAVER'S TAIL.

The Beaver's tail was originally like that of the Rat; but it is said that Chitacholi, the culture-hero of the Loucheux, once stepped on it and flattened it into its present shape.

## 4. THE CULTURE-HERO.

Chitacholi<sup>1</sup> was the youngest of three sons. One day his father, mother, and eldest brother went away hunting, leaving him at home with his other brother, as they were still quite small. To amuse himself, Chitacholi made a bow and many sharp arrows. "What are these for?" asked his brother. "To shoot birds with," was the answer. His elder brother laughed, and said, "These arrows are too small; you will never kill anything with them." — "Never mind!" answered Chitacholi, "wait and see!" Scoffing at the idea, his brother said, "You may shoot at me, for I am sure it will not hurt me at all." Chitacholi at first would not do it; "for," said he, "I might hurt you!" But his brother teased him so much, that at last he agreed to do so.<sup>2</sup>

## 5. TETOGOLEE.

In the days when the country was inhabited by giants, there was a widow named Tetogolee, who had three sons. In the autumn, one year, fish was very scarce: so the old woman made some medicine one night, and in the morning sent her three sons to hunt caribou in the mountains across the river. Before they left, she told them, "You shall kill game; and when you return, you must come straight home, and not look back at all."

They went off, [killed many caribou,] and hurried back to their mother's camp with the venison. Upon reaching the river, they stopped to rest on the high bluff overlooking their camp. One of them, forgetting his mother's instructions, looked around to see how low the sun was getting. He had no sooner looked back than the three brothers were at once changed into stone pillars, as well as their mother, who was then looking at them from across the river.

Only one of these pillars, named "Shiltee,"<sup>3</sup> is still standing,

<sup>1</sup> Additional remarks found in Mr. Camsell's notes: "Chitacholi is the traditional hero of the Loucheux. He corresponds to the Cree Wesackaychack, who is said to have destroyed all the giants and animals in the country that were at all dangerous to the Indians."

<sup>2</sup> Unfinished in Mr. Camsell's field-notes.

<sup>3</sup> "Shiltee" (meaning "a pillar") is a high rock on the banks of the Peel River, three miles lower than Tetogolee, which is a high bluff of sandstone at the Big Eddy. — MR. CAMSELL.

the others having fallen within the memory of the neighboring tribe. Tetogolee has better withstood the test of time, and still preserves the original shape of the widow's camp.

#### 6. THE CROW'S TRICKS.

A Loucheux chief was so proud of his beautiful daughter, that he resolved to marry her only to the most handsome man of the land. His camp stood by the river's edge; and every canoe that passed was stopped by his son, and the young men brought over to him for inspection. None was ever found worthy, and the girl remained unmarried.

Having heard of it, the Crow decided to play a trick on the old chief.<sup>1</sup> He put on a wonderful coat, which sparkled in the sun like fish-scales, and he paddled his canoe down the river. As he feigned to go by, he was compelled by the chief's son to come into the lodge. He had barely landed before the chief was greatly impressed with his beautiful clothes. Indeed, he was sure that the new-comer would make a suitable husband for his daughter. So they were married.

They had been living together but a short time, however, when the chief began to suspect something. The Crow, in fact, would never remove his moccasins, for fear that some one might notice that he had only three toes. That is why the chief became suspicious. Caught in a heavy rainstorm that came unexpectedly one day, the Crow was recognized by the chief's party; for his beautiful spangled coat had been washed off, and his black feathers underneath exposed. The people made for him; but he got up and simply flew away, mocking them.

Ere long the Crow played another trick upon the same band of Indians. He went to a certain place above their camp, along the river, and built many rafts. Setting them on fire, he let them drift down the river, past the chief's lodge. The chief feared that something had happened to his relatives, and, going into mourning, his people burnt their hair off. This was no sooner done than the Crow again appeared, saying, "Your relatives are still alive and safe. I am the one who sent down the burning rafts." The people were truly angry and disgusted, and the Crow had a hearty laugh at their expense.

#### 7. THE TRICKSTER.

The Crow was always ashamed of his ragged feathers, and envious of the other birds' plumage.<sup>2</sup> [That is why] one day he played a trick

<sup>1</sup> The informant added here, that "from the beginning the Crow has always been the enemy of the Indians. Annoying them in every possible way, he plunders their caches and removes the bait from their traps." This character corresponds to Wolverine in the east.

<sup>2</sup> These birds and animals, added the informant, later became men; that is, the present-day Indians.

upon them. Some of their friends and relatives had just died, so he told them. Going at once into mourning, they burnt the hair off their heads, as was the custom among the Loucheux; and the Crow laughed at them, saying, "It is only a joke!" They caught him, and decided to throw him into the fire and burn his feathers. To follow his own suggestion, they tied his hands and feet fast, lifted him up, and threw him towards the fire. He had no sooner slipped off their hands than he broke his bands and flew away. Astonished, they could only exclaim, "He has once again tricked us, brothers!"

#### 8. THE GRIZZLY BEAR AND THE CROW.

The Black Bear and the Grizzly Bear (his uncle) were living together in a large double camp, where the Grizzly occupied one side of the fire, and his nephew the other. Although the Grizzly had a number of wives, he had but one child, a daughter, and she was unmarried.

The old Grizzly one day told his daughter that if she ever saw any copper on the trail through the bush, which the women used to follow every day, she should sit down on it. Once she found some copper lying on the trail, and, to comply with her father's advice, she sat down on it; and some time later she gave birth to a son; and the old Grizzly became very fond of his grandchild.<sup>1</sup>

Now, then, the Grizzly had a huge "medicine"<sup>2</sup> bag hanging in one corner of his house, for he was a great shaman.<sup>3</sup> No one was ever allowed to touch the bag; and once, having caught the Fox prowling about his camp, he dragged him in, tore off his left shoulder, and then let him go. The shoulder he hung up in the lodge near his medicine-pouch.

The loss of his limb was indeed painful to the Fox, and he freely gave vent to his feelings. Day and night he howled so incessantly, that the other animals could not sleep, and were annoyed. When they discovered the Fox's plight, they gathered in a council and studied what could be done for him. Indicating the spot where his shoulder hung, he asked them for help. Nobody at first was brave enough to go and capture the missing limb; but at last the Crow stood up, and said, "Leave it to me, and I will get it!" The Crow was known as a powerful shaman, so the other animals were willing enough to let him do as he wanted.

The Crow now went to see the Sparrow-Hawk, and asked for his assistance. The Sparrow-Hawk was really able to help the Crow, and quite willing to do so. "Now," said the Crow, "let us go together in

<sup>1</sup> This incident seems related to the stories of Raven and the beautiful girl (see, for instance, L. Farrand, *Traditions of the Chilcotin Indians*, p. 17).

<sup>2</sup> A bag containing charms and amulets, many of which are heirlooms.

<sup>3</sup> Or medicine-man.

my canoe to the Grizzly's camp! As soon as we get there, I will go up and see the Grizzly; and meanwhile you must remain in the canoe, ready to push out from the shore as soon as I step back into the canoe." This was agreed, and off they went together in a small canoe to the Grizzly's camp. When the Crow came into the Bear's lodge, he was welcomed, and given something to eat. After a while he began to tell stories to the Grizzly, who listened attentively at first, but soon got tired and dozed. As the Grizzly's eyes were closed, the Crow rattled the contents of the large medicine-pouch with a stick. Waking with a start, the Grizzly wanted to know who was meddling with his bag. The Crow said, "My stories did not seem to interest you, and you were simply dreaming; nobody meddled with your medicine-bag." The Bear believed it, and asked the Crow to continue his story. So it happened, and he began to doze. The Crow again rattled the contents of the bag, and the Grizzly woke up with a start. Getting rather angry, he asked, "Who is meddling with my bag?" His guest again replied, "You were only dreaming." So the Grizzly this time went to sleep. As soon as he was fast asleep, the Crow gently removed the Fox's shoulder from the corner, and made for the door. The Black Bear looked up, and saw him getting out with the shoulder in his hand. "Uncle!" he shouted, "he is running away with the Fox's shoulder!" Jumping up, the Grizzly chased the thief, but it was too late: the Crow was already in the canoe, and, with his companion the Sparrow-Hawk, he was paddling downstream as hard as he could. The Grizzly was truly angry, but he could not catch them.

Now, this is how the Crow had warned the other animals: "Be ready when I return with the Fox's shoulder!" So, as soon as they saw him drawing near, they got hold of the Fox, washed all the dirt off his sore shoulder, and cleansed it carefully. No sooner had the Crow landed than he clapped the shoulder on to the Fox, and stuck it in place, so that it might not come off again.<sup>1</sup>

That is why the old Grizzly was quite angry. To punish the Indians,<sup>2</sup> he took the sun down from the sky, put it in his medicine-pouch, and hung it up in his lodge. The land now remained in darkness, and there were no longer days. As the Indians were unable to hunt, they soon began to starve. The Lynx and the Owl had to hunt all the time, but they were unable to get enough meat for the large crowd of starving people. So the Crow again was sent to the Grizzly's camp. His mission was to try to get the sun and restore it to its former

<sup>1</sup> Compare L. Farrand, *l. c.*, p. 23; F. Boas, *Indianische Sagen von der Nordwest Küste Amerikas*, p. 78 (Comox); J. R. Swanton, *Haida Texts and Myths*, p. 136; E. Sapir, *Wishram Texts*, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> Earlier in the text, "animals" instead of "Indians" are said to have helped the Fox. This is no doubt due to the Loucheux belief that in the beginning men and animals were the same.

place; but, afraid of going into the Bear's lodge, he hid himself in the willows near by, and waited for his opportunity.

Now, then, Grizzly's grandchild had seen the sun when it was put into the bag. He tried to induce his grandfather to let him play with it, but old Grizzly would not listen to him. The boy cried so much about it, that at last the Black Bear asked his uncle to let the boy play with the sun for a little while. In the end the Grizzly took the sun down and gave it to his grandson, saying, "You must not take it outside of the lodge." So delighted was the boy when he got the sun, that he at once began throwing it up, catching it, and rolling it all around in the lodge. As he missed it once, it rolled outside through the door; and before he could catch it again, the Crow seized it and cast it back into its place in the sky.<sup>1</sup>

#### 9. THE CROW'S HOME.

The mouth of the Arctic Red River, according to the Loucheux traditions, is the place where the Crow formerly had his permanent camp. Two round basin-like depressions still indicate the place where he had his bed.

#### 10. THE MAN IN THE MOON.

Once, a long time ago, a child asked his parents to let him make some "medicine"<sup>2</sup> for deer-hunting, so that his father might kill a great many fat deer wherever he wanted to; but he was so young that he could barely walk as yet, and his father did not want him to do so, thinking that the medicine would not be strong enough. The boy implored him; and, being again refused permission, he began to cry. Day and night he cried, until the Indians in the neighborhood were concerned, and inquired from the hunter about the cause of all these tears. But when they were told the reason why, they were satisfied that the boy was too small to prepare a "medicine." So disturbed were they by the cries, however, that in the end they persuaded the hunter to humor his son. So the boy made some medicine, and said to the people, "You shall now kill as many deer as you wish, but you must always give the fattest animals to my father."

Now, then, they went out hunting, and killed a great number of deer, many of which were very fat. Instead of complying with their promise, however, some Indians kept the fattest game for themselves, and gave only the next choice to the child's father; and from this time

<sup>1</sup> Compare the tales of the origin of daylight from the North Pacific coast, in which Raven becomes the grandchild of the owner of daylight in order to be enabled to carry it away (see, for instance, John R. Swanton, *l. c.*, p. 116; and R. H. Lowie, *The Assiniboine*, pp. 101-104).

<sup>2</sup> This is a popular term to designate some kind of charm or operation based on sympathetic magic, the nature of which is not explained here.

on the hunters failed to kill any deer. Soon the people began to starve. The boy again made a "medicine;" for he and his father, like the others, had no longer anything to eat. "You must take a fine and clean deer-skin," said he to his father, "and make it into a bag. When it is done, lay it on your sledge, outside of the lodge. Then take a deer's shoulder, cut all the meat off it, and, when only the clean bone is left, put it along with a bit of blood into the bag on the sledge." So it was done; and the next morning, as the hunter looked at the bones in the pouch, he found them covered with flesh. Day after day the same thing happened, the bones being found with new flesh every day, in the morning. So the boy and his father had enough to eat, while, as long as the famine lasted, the other Indians were starving.

One day the boy spoke to his father, saying, "Father, I should like to go to the moon on a visit." But the old man replied, "What is the use, my son, as you could not get there?" — "Never mind!" said the child, "if I suddenly disappear some day, you will know that I have gone to the moon."

When, soon after, the hunter got up in the morning, he could not find his son. His calls remained without an answer. Searching for the child, he only found one leg of his trousers hanging at the top of the lodge-pole, in the smoke-hole. This reminded him of what the boy had said about going to the moon. So when the moon rose that night, he looked up, and, sure enough, the boy was standing in it with one leg of his trousers torn off. That is why ever since the man in the moon has one of his legs bare.<sup>1</sup>

## II. WOLVERENE AND THE MAN.<sup>2</sup>

The Wolverine made a pitfall, with sharp stakes in the bottom. All the animals and some Indians, he thought, would fall into it and be caught; but he really was unable ever to catch one of them. A man one day detected the trap, and knew that the Wolverine had set it to catch Indians: so he decided to play a trick on him. Getting into the pitfall one day, the man made his nose bleed on some of the stakes; and then he lay at the bottom just as if he were dead. The Wolverine soon came along, and chuckled to himself when he found he had at last caught an Indian. He put the man into his pouch and brought him home to eat him. Pretending to be dead, the Indian lay for some time in the camp; but when some of the young Wolverenes tried to poke his eyes out with a stick, he jumped up and ran away. As he was chased by the Wolverine, he climbed a tree. The pursuer could not reach him there; so he determined to keep the Indian in the tree

<sup>1</sup> For other versions see Petitot, *Monographie des Déné-Dindjié*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>2</sup> See Boas, *The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay* (*Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, vol. xv, p. 176).



until he starved and came down. He blew his nose on the tree to taunt him, and the phlegm at once turned into gum. "This is what you must eat," said he, "or else you shall starve before I let you come down." The man remained there chewing gum until he got tired; but he came down as soon as the Wolverine went away, and he ran to his own camp. Knowing that the Wolverine would again visit the tree, he went back and made a pitfall near it. Soon after the Wolverine came directly to the trap, fell into it, and was killed on the sharp sticks.

The Indians have ever since chewed the gum of the spruce-trees.

#### 12. WHY THE BEARS HAVE SHORT TAILS.<sup>1</sup>

At first all the bears had long tails. One winter day the Bear met the Fox, who had a fine lot of crawfish. Being hungry, the Bear wanted some too: so he asked the Fox where and how he got his crawfish. The Fox replied, "I caught them in the lake, through a hole in the ice;" and he added, "Go and stick your tail down into the water, and let it stay there until it pinches you. The more it hurts, the more fish you will have." This was what the Bear had in mind to do: so he proceeded down to the lake, and made a hole through the ice. Sitting over it, he let his tail hang in the cold water. When it began to freeze, he felt a pain; but, as he wanted to catch lots of fish, he did not stir until his tail was frozen fast in the ice. The Fox's instructions were not forgotten: so he suddenly jumped up, in the expectation of getting heaps of fish; but he merely broke his tail off near the body instead. And ever since the bears have had short tails.

#### 13. THE OLD MAN, THE BEAR, AND THE ERMINE.<sup>2</sup>

An old man was once sitting by the water's edge all alone, and laughing quietly to himself over some recollections. A Bear came out of the willows behind him, and heard him laughing. "Whom are you laughing at?" asked the Bear. "I am laughing over something that happened years ago," replied the old man. "I do not believe it," said the Bear; "you are laughing at me, I think, and I don't like it." The old man protested that it was not so, but the Bear would not be convinced. "Now," said the Bear, "go into the woods there, gather heaps of dry wood, and bring it here. Then I will burn you on it. If you refuse to do so, I will kill you where you are."

Quite frightened, the old man decided to go and gather some wood. Meanwhile he was thinking of some means of escaping. In the woods

<sup>1</sup> An Old-World tale (see Dähnhardt, *Natursagen*, vol. iv, pp. 217 *et seq.*); also collected among the Oklahoma Wyandots by C. M. Barbeau.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Camsell adds, "I am informed that a similar tradition is found among the Eskimo; but a mouse instead of an ermine kills the bear." Other analogues are numerous (see, for instance, J. R. Swanton, *Tlingit Myths*, p. 17).

he came across the Ermine, and said, "I will make your fur beautifully white if you can help me kill the Bear." Willing to try, the Ermine went to see the Bear, who was sitting by the water's edge waiting for the old man to bring the wood. The Bear had to wait for a long time under a very hot sun, so he began to doze; and, as he yawned, the Ermine quickly jumped down his throat, and began to tear down his heart. He ate the Bear's heart, thus killing him. Then he came out and told the old man about his feat. That is why the old man fulfilled his promise and made the Ermine's skin white.

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